

A Short History of the New Hampshire National Guard

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The New Hampshire National Guard as a militia for self-defense can be traced back to 1623 and the first settlements near the mouth of the Pascataqua River in Portsmouth, NH. At Fort Point in Newcastle, a defensive earth works was established. By 1631 it held several brass cannons. The colonists were equipped with an arsenal of firearms and other weaponry. Later, a wooden fortification and more cannon became Fort William and Mary, and today Fort Constitution continues to occupy this original site.

The colonists' initial friendly relations with the Indians deteriorated and after 50 years of increasing mistreatment the Indians retaliated with raids on colonial settlements. In 1675 the first Indian attack in New Hampshire occurred at Oyster River in present day Durham. The small band that descended on the settlement burned homes and arbitrarily slaughtered or took captive men, women, and children.

Shortly after, in 1679, New Hampshire was granted its own charter and independence from the Massachusetts colony. Accordingly, the new province promptly established a formal state militia from the existing town militias. This marked the official origin of the New Hampshire National Guard. Men from ages 16 to 60 were required to attend monthly musters, and seacoast towns erected numerous forts and garrison houses for protection from the Indians.

French and Indian War

During these times New Hampshire was a microcosm of the larger feud between the English and the French in their quest to dominate the continent. With the Indians, incited by the French conducting hostile raids, and the colonial militias alternating between defense and offense, the carnage ebbed and flowed for almost 100 years, when the French and Indian War put an end to Indian attacks and settled the question of domination.

The French and Indian War did not end, however, without producing two New Hampshire military leaders. Robert Rogers became the captain of the first British Ranger Company. His exploits and his Ranger Rules secured his position as the father of today's Green Berets. Another rugged New Hampshire youth was captured by Indians and taken to Canada. There, being forced to run a gauntlet, John Stark grabbed a club and *delivered* blows rather than receiving them. In the French and Indian War, he was a captain in a Ranger unit, and became a major general in the Revolutionary War.

During the 1770s the relationship between mother country and colony strained to the breaking point. In one of the first acts of armed rebellion, John Langdon, a NH merchant, and a crowd of 400 men and boys arrived at Fort William and Mary to demand British surrender. Shots were fired, but with only six men against the mob, the British captain was forced to surrender the fort. Langdon and his men liberated almost 100 barrels of gunpowder. Stored at various sites throughout New England, the gunpowder was eventually returned to the British throughout the year of 1775, but only in small amounts and always behind a lead ball.

Revolutionary War & Civil War

In the spring of 1775 the news of the battles at Lexington and Concord spread like wildfire. John Stark led men from all over New Hampshire to Massachusetts where they comprised over half the fighting force at the Battle of Bunker Hill. Only after they were out of powder and shot did they yield their position to a third British advance. Stark's cool demeanor while facing the best of the British Army at Bunker Hill stands tall among Revolutionary War exploits.

Two years after Bunker Hill, Stark became the Brigadier General of the New Hampshire State Militia with an independent command of 1,500 men. With his commission in hand, and against orders, the indomitable Stark headed to Bennington, Vermont and halted a British column from Canada. They were attempting to cut the colonies in half and win the war. His double victory on Aug. 16, 1777 forced the British surrender at Saratoga, and turned the tide of the entire war.

Throughout the first half of the next century, while the militia system was in decline, New Hampshire men enlisted as regulars and in two more wars did their share in revealing the clear superiority of American troops in battle. During the War of 1812, Colonel James Miller and his 21st Regiment of New Hampshire men stormed and held a British artillery stronghold, which had been raking the Americans with ball and canister. Miller's success at the Battle of Lundy's Lane earned admiration even from the captured British officers.

In the later Mexican War, Brigadier General Franklin Pierce ordered a cannon barrage toward an out of range stronghold. Not a single cannon ball came close, but the thunderous display of artillery dispersed the Mexican soldiers and Pierce's New Hampshire troops took the position.

In 1860, Southern states began a war against their Northern neighbors as they sought independence and autonomy. To help preserve the Union, New Hampshire sent 17 infantry regiments to war, as well as units of sharpshooters, light and heavy artillery and cavalry.

In every major battle of the Civil War, New Hampshire troops gave their blood and their lives. At Gettysburg, New Hampshire's light artillery turned away Pickett's Charge. The 2nd, 5th, and 12th Infantry Regiments all contributed to this defining battle, which would serve to alter the course of the war. Colonel Edward Cross, the gallant leader of New Hampshire's "Fighting Fifth" Infantry Regiment, was killed here. And by the end of the war, the Fifth New Hampshire had achieved another unhappy distinction of having lost more men than any other union regiment.

World Wars I & II

At the end of the 19th century New Hampshire volunteers fought in the Spanish-American War. In 1916, the NH National Guard was at Lorado, Texas helping to guard the border against the Mexican renegade "Pancho" Villa. Unintentionally, this latter activation proved an excellent training ground for America's 1917 deployment to Europe and World War I. And although the NH National Guard had almost no role in this war, most of its men saw action as members of New England's 26th Infantry "Yankee" Division.

In a re-organization after the First World War, the NH National Guard departed from its infantry roots to become the 172nd Field Artillery, and the 197th Coastal Artillery. A generation later both were at war, one in Europe and the other in the Pacific.

Upon being activated, the 172nd headed for Camp Blanding, Florida where it helped erect a full military training post on top of the sand dunes. After taking part in the Louisiana Maneuvers they followed the D-Day invasion troops into Europe where they began an intense 10 months of cannon barrage, pushing the German army back across France and Belgium and into Germany.

After Pearl Harbor, the 197th Field Artillery was sent to protect the harbor at Fremantle, Australia. Their anti-aircraft support was vital as this was the initial supply outpost for the Asiatic fleet. Stepping beyond their normal routine, some of the men managed to repair a fire-damaged submarine. The admiral, amazed at how the Army could fix a navy sub, learned that prior to the war some of the men of the 197th had actually built the submarine as civilians at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. As the war progressed, the ground troops moved forward, and the 197th moved with them, providing anti-aircraft and even infantry support in New Guinea and through the Philippines, helping fulfill General Douglas MacArthur's promise to "return."

Birth of Air Guard

At the end of World War II, a new branch of the military was born – the Air Force and the Air National Guard. In New Hampshire, the Air National Guard's first mission was as a Fighter Squadron based at Grenier Field, at the present day Manchester Airport. During the Korean War, only the NH Air Guard was activated. Its mission was to train Air Force pilots. Some of the airmen were reassigned to other bases around the world and a few flew combat missions in Korea.

In 1960, the mission of the NH Air National Guard changed to Air Transport in time for their participation in the 1961 Berlin Crisis. This is also when they received their present 157th designation. In the mid 60's, the 157th moved to Pease Air Force Base, from which they also began flying logistical support to U.S. troops in Vietnam. In 1974, the NH Air National Guard received its current mission as in-flight refuelers. And today, the 157th Air Refueling Wing takes on air refueling missions anywhere in the world.

Vietnam War

The Vietnam War saw the activation of the NH Army National Guard's 3rd Battalion, 197th Field Artillery. Over 500 New Hampshire troops served with distinction at varied locations within Vietnam. However, on its last day, an unprecedented tragedy occurred as five soldiers lost their lives on their way to the airport when their truck hit a land mine. Manchester, home to all five men, called for a day of mourning and thousands around the state grieved with them.

Twenty years later, two other NH Army National Guard units were activated in support of Operation Desert Storm which led to the liberation of the tiny nation of Kuwait. The 744th Transportation Company hauled tons of supplies and ammunition across Iraq for the advancing coalition forces and the 1159th Medical Company served stateside at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

In addition to overseas deployments, the NH National Guard has responsibilities at home as well. Among its peacetime missions are a State Partnership Program with the Central American country of El Salvador, rescuing lost or injured hikers in New Hampshire's White Mountains, and responding to natural disasters – flood damage in Alstead and hurricane damage in Louisiana where New Orleans had been wiped out by Hurricane Katrina and Rita in 2005.

9/11

On September 11, 2001, the image of planes crashing into New York City's World Trade Towers is indelibly etched in our minds. The New Hampshire Guard responded, first by securing its armories and later by providing an added security presence at New Hampshire's municipal airports. Within hours of the 9/11 attacks, the NH Air Guard began refueling the fighter jets that patrolled the airspace over major U.S. cities. The 157th was later deployed overseas in support of the war on terrorism.

The NH National Guard responded to Operation Iraqi Freedom in what was the largest call up of New Hampshire troops since World War II. Over half of New Hampshire's soldiers and airmen served overseas, conducting various security and infantry missions, providing medical care, building schools, and fostering international relations. The 157th refueled planes further forward in the conflict than at any other time in their history.

As the military services and the National Guard undergo a transformation to best meet the challenges of a changing world, new concepts such as modular forces and brigade combat teams are replacing traditional unit structures. Today, following the footsteps of their forebears, the men and women of the New Hampshire National Guard proudly serve, bringing to a close one chapter of our story while empty pages await the writing of another.